

and author are given, together with the meaning of the Latin name or a biographical note if named after a person. Descriptions are well expressed in simple botanical language. Distribution is given by Otway region, Australian States other than Victoria, and overseas, if applicable. The final pages, again with coloured margins, include an excellent illustrated glossary, a long list of literature references and a comprehensive index.

The book is greatly enriched by the inclusion of an interesting variety of notes and drawings of associated small wildlife such as butterflies, a sand snail and the Mistletoebird. Distinctive pollination methods are described. Although

this is a scholarly work, it is expressed in concise, simple language, and is a tribute to the author's knowledge and concern for the preservation of her environment.

As a field guide for identification of species the book works well, once one has taken a little time to understand the layout. It is a delight to read, if only for enjoyment of the illustrations and appreciation of all the extra little snippets of information scattered throughout.

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Snarls from the Tea-tree Big Cat Folklore

by David Waldron and Simon Townsend

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For many years there have been reports of mysterious animals in the Australian bush. These include mythical creatures such as the bunyip and yarrrie, but also supposedly extinct marsupial carnivores—the Thylacine and the Marsupial Lion. A third group of animals reported from unusual prey kills, footprints and sightings comprise panthers and other 'big cats'. Lobbying of politicians resulted in the somewhat surprising announcement by the newly elected Coalition Government in Victoria to honour an election pledge presumably to rural constituents, to order that a desk-top study be undertaken to evaluate the evidence for big cat presence in Victoria. Not surprisingly, the report found there was no irrefutable evidence in favour of panthers or the like in Victoria; of course this is hardly unexpected—after all, how do you prove a species is NOT present? The report did, however, document sufficient unexplained observations to whet the appetite of big cat proponents and cryptozoologists alike!

The book is interesting in that it does not come out stridently in favour of one outcome or the other. Instead, it is presented in two parts—the first by David Waldron, a researcher from the University of Ballarat who specialises in the interconnection between history and anthropology and who is interested in folklore and the development of myths. In essence, Waldron's chapters explore the historical context of big cat sightings and provide plausible explanations for the development of the myths that surround this topic—and how they have been reported (or misreported) in local media. The second component is written by Simon Townsend and it essentially documents the cases for big cat reports.

The book is very readable and contains some interesting stories. The most famous might be about the Tantanoola Tiger, which apparently caused panic in south-east South Australia through savage stock killings over four years from 1892. Settlers blamed a tiger that had perhaps escaped from a zoo, others an Assyrian



ian wolf and others a Thylacine (local souvenir shops still feature the Tantanoola animal as a Thylacine). In the end a large, feral crossbreed dog was shot and its stuffed carcass is on display at the local pub! Nonetheless, some killings supposedly continued but the authors claim these perhaps were used to cover up widespread stock stealing going on at the time.

Another case examined in some detail in the book refers to the release in the Grampians of a pet panther by US servicemen at the end of World War II. It is somewhat a stretch of the imagination to believe that this animal and its progeny continued to kill animals over an increasingly wide area for decades. Nonetheless, there is proof that servicemen did indeed have pet mascots for their regiments—a RAAF pilot had a lion cub; a seaman a tiger cub aboard HMAS *Australia*; an engineer a pet leopard; and US Marines had a pet lion cub. At the end of the war, apparently, many Australians return-

ing home brought with them an exotic collection of monkeys, bears, deer, dogs and a whole menagerie! Indeed, one transport vessel was 'boarded and searched by customs to find over 1650 animals on board including a deer and bear cub' (page 58). So it is easy to understand the potential for these animals to be dumped in the bush rather than put down as demanded by authorities.

So what is the conclusion from most big cat kills reported? The authors do not rule out the possibility of sheep and kangaroo being attacked by panthers, lions or other predators, but find that most reports are explained by the presence of large dogs. Thus 'during the 1940s and early 1950s claims that the Victorian countryside was home to a population of large cat-like predators continued unabated despite the official consensus in the mainstream media and government that mysterious stock kills and sightings were, in fact, wild dogs or dingoes. A pattern had become firmly established in Australian culture of big cat panics occurring during times of perceived wild dog/dingo epidemics and mass stock losses with the panic being resolved with the presentation of an oversized canine to the media and government as the 'true' culprit and source of the panic' (page 66).

The book is not without its faults. It essentially reads as two small books bound together under the one cover. It is in need of a thorough editing to correct grammatical mistakes, bad spelling (130 *angels* instead of *anglers* brought a smile) and omission of punctuation that leads to ambiguity. However, as one of the few comprehensive documentations of big cat evidence in Australia and presentations of interesting anecdotes throughout, it would make a most enjoyable read for naturalists and those interested in the folklore surrounding the Australian bush.

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